

The Importance of Program Assessment

How Planning and Team Work Paid off For Murray Calloway Co. ATC

Program Assessment is here to stay. This comprehensive process helped lay the “documented” foundation for KY Tech to become the first technical education school system in the United States to achieve SACS/CASI (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools/Council on Accreditation and School Improvement) accreditation. ***It took work – a lot of hard work and dedication on the part of OCTE Program Assessment Branch Manager Myra Wilson and Academic Consultant Wayne King; but particularly for KY Tech teachers who worked across academic and technical education boundary lines to meet the 21 rigorous standards in the program assessment process. All are to be commended for their efforts!***

Program assessment was originally created as a result of a 2000 legislative initiative. Its underlying purpose has always been to set standards leading to program improvement. The first cycle of assessment visits were conducted from 2001-2005. A second cycle of visits began during the 2005-06 school year and 27 ATCs underwent program assessment visits. The remaining 28 KY Tech ATCs will undergo a visit during the 2006-07 school year.

Since the onset of the initiative, OCTE and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) have worked cooperatively on all aspects of designing and implementing program assessment. **Since the onset of program assessment visits, principals and their respective faculty and staff have looked for ways to approach the process in a disciplined manner to achieve maximum results.** Many have grown to better understand the process and done extremely well in documenting the standards. While various plans are in place across the system, everyone whole heartedly agrees that the program assessment training sessions, provided by Wilson and King have been extremely beneficial. In addition to all the training sessions, a special web site was developed as an informational and supplementary resource for teachers to use in understanding the process. It can be accessed through the following link - <http://www.kytech.ky.gov/programassessment.htm>

When Murray Calloway Co. ATC Principal Dennis Harper learned his school was scheduled for a program assessment visit during the 2005-06 school year, he began creating a plan that he felt would be of assistance to his staff. He realized the importance of program assessment, program improvement and the ultimate relationship to SACS accreditation.

Beginning at the start of the new school year, his entire staff met two hours, after school, on a weekly basis. As a team, they collectively looked at the school year one quarter at a time and at what aspects of program assessment were affected in that time frame. They also looked at applications for the documentation and collectively put that information together. Their time, effort and energy paid off!

“Our former Area Supervisor, Mr. Phil Rudolph, was in agreement that it was a good utilization of time to work beyond the school day to complete program assessment requirements. As principal, I could not be more appreciative of the entire staff we have assembled here at the Murray-Calloway Co. ATC,” says Harper.

The final outcome of their united efforts yielded a positive result as all seven programs in the ATC attained a score of 3.62 or above. Three programs were recognized in a statewide group of 14 that reached a score of 3.8 or above. Those programs included culinary arts (3.8); health sciences (3.86); and welding (3.9).

“Our approach to documenting the standards was that of team work and commitment to quality. We have a great instructional staff here as well as tremendous support from our administrative secretary and maintenance individual. Their dedication to the organization certainly was a welcome contribution to the overall assessment process too,” says Harper. “The total cooperation exhibited through the program assessment process was evident in the scores our teachers attained. Because of the team approach we instituted at our school, it is difficult to praise any one individual as a result of this process without inclusion of every member of our staff – even though there were slightly higher scores in some program areas. As we worked to achieve perfection prior to our visit, we came to realize during our visit that



**Dennis Harper
Principal**



Photo (l to r, back row): Murray Calloway Co. ATC Principal Dennis Harper; Culinary Arts Instructor Amy McAlpin; Welding Instructor Paul Caldwell; and Health Sciences Instructor Cindy Wise. Front row: Administrative Secretary Glenda Rowlett.

discrepancies in scores could be attributed to factors outside of an instructor's control that inhibit the possibility of reaching the level of assessment some of the teachers would have hoped to receive. We believe that addressing these types of issues from a *continuous improvement standpoint will only help to perfect the process for all the stakeholders.*"

Murray Calloway Co. ATC Welding Instructor Paul Caldwell achieved a score of 3.9 during the program assessment process – the highest in his school. Caldwell originally decided to become a teacher because he wanted to make an impression on students similar to what his teachers gave to him. He started teaching during the 2003-04 school year. "It has made my life," says Caldwell. "I'm a welding

instructor, but I'm also responsible for helping these students get a job and that's what it's all about – teaching skills so people can make a living."

Coming from industry to the world of education, Caldwell had a full understanding of the importance of paperwork, and had an idea that it would greatly increase when he reached the classroom.



“While it’s not one of my most favorite jobs to perform, I know it’s important and program assessment is our system of documentation. It has gotten easier for me over the past three years – by a long shot. But, it’s still very time consuming,” says Caldwell. “Our staff works together so that we can talk about all the standards and what might be applicable for our programs. We all went to the program assessment staff development training and it helped. Both Mrs. Wilson and Wayne King do a great job of explaining the process. We came home with a new perspective on what we needed to collect over the year. It’s still time consuming, but if you keep up with the paperwork on a daily basis, then it’s not so difficult.”

Photo at left: Welding Instructor Paul Caldwell

Photo at right: Health Sciences Instructor Cindy Wise

“At our school, we all work together. We all pitch in and get done what needs to be done. When preparing for our team visit, we put in a great deal of extra time after the school day. Our principal, the teachers and I all stayed late, and we all worked together to make sure the documentation was in the boxes. When you have a staff that cares about each other and about providing the very best education for students, then you have a staff that will do whatever it takes to make the school better.”

**Glenda Rowlett, Administrative Secretary
KY Tech Outstanding Staff Achievement
(1988 and 2004)**

**Health Sciences Instructor
Cindy Wise (3.86 score on
program assessment) has
been part of the KY Tech
school system since she
began teaching at the former
Oldham Co. ATC in 1995. She
accepted a position at Murray
Calloway Co. ATC and started
teaching during the 2001- 02
school year.**



Of the program assessment process, Wise relays, “We had meetings every week. Over the course of time, we made sure we all went through our boxes standard by standard. This allowed us to keep a check on each other so that all areas were covered. It also helped all of us make sure we had everything we needed for the program assessment – it served as a reminder to each – ‘have you done this?’ *The most positive result was that it kept down the frustration level among all of us because we felt like we were all better prepared for the visit.* This assessment is time intensive and I worked many hours to make sure all the standards were covered. My nature is to be well organized, but I think that having to go through this process helped me to stay on my toes.”

Wise is appreciative of the approach her principal took to make sure his entire faculty was on board with the program assessment process. She believes the time spent upfront provided everyone with a thorough understanding of how to approach the process and ultimately reach success.

“Mr. Harper has been very supportive of the program assessment process. We all understand that this is here to stay and wanted to approach the process in a positive manner. His leadership in this has helped all of us to stay on task,” says Wise. “We are all responsible for our own program specific information; however, Glenda Rowlett has done an outstanding job of assembling all of the school data that needs to be included in the box.”

Photo (l to r): Health Sciences Instructor Cindy Wise takes the pulse of Culinary Arts Instructor Amy McAlpin.



Amy McAlpin, the culinary arts instructor (score of 3.8 on program assessment) was brand new to the KY Tech system during the school's 2005-06 program assessment visit. Prior to being hired at Murray Calloway Co. ATC, she was the family and consumer sciences instructor at Paducah Tilghman HS.

“Coming from a local school district into the KY Tech system was a major change for me. However, by my being a typical education teacher in a local high school, I was expected to perform many of the same duties as the activities in the program assessment box – but I did not have to go through all of the documentation that this system requires. I was new to this entire process and quite frankly, somewhat overwhelmed by what it involved. Working together as a team in my school helped me greatly by keeping down the frustration level because we broke down the standards into manageable units,” says McAlpin. “The process identified for me the strengths that I possess in this job. I could look through all the information and see what took place as a result of what I was able to accomplish in my classroom. At the same time, it also brought out the strengths of all of my colleagues and I would say to myself, how can I emulate that?”

Ever thoughtful of the process, many teachers who have gone through program assessment agree that it would be beneficial to sit down with program assessment team members for a final debriefing. The unified perception is that this would help perfect the process for all stakeholders, from a continuous improvement standpoint, by providing each with an opportunity to understand why they have the score that they have. They are not; however, suggesting that this process allow any teacher to include some additional pieces of information after the program assessment visit has been concluded.



**Culinary Arts Instructor
Amy McAlpin**



(L to R): McAlpin, Caldwell and Wise

Program assessment isn't the end of a process – it's a part of the whole continuous improvement process. Receiving SACS accreditation was an historic event for the KY Tech school system – one that everyone in the system helped to achieve. AND, program assessment was a corner stone in the whole endeavor because it is a critical piece of information required to support the continuous process of improvement. HOW? Documentation. KY Tech stakeholders met quality standards that provide for quality assurance on a program by program basis. While continuous improvement is an ongoing quality assurance measure, program assessment has proven to be a testament to the quality staff throughout the KY Tech School System.



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By: Fran Dundon

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